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Something to think about ...

Are you as smart as an African Grey Parrot? The answer is, “probably,” although it depends on how old you are. Over the past few decades, animal researchers have done extensive testing on the intelligence of African Grey Parrots, teaching them vocabulary and mathematical equations, and in certain tasks, many of those parrots are able to out-perform 3-5 year old human children.

One famous parrot, Alex, was able to differentiate between objects, colors, materials, and shapes and could even do simple addition. His mathematical abilities were discovered accidentally when a researcher was attempting to get another parrot to equate sound sequences with quantities. She played two clicks, hoping that the test parrot would respond with the word “two,” but the test parrot said nothing. She played the two clicks again, and while the test parrot continued to ignore the researcher, Alex who was also in the room, helpfully responded, “Four.” The researcher played the two clicks one more time and Alex squawked, “Six,” I imagine with a roll of his eyes at his dunce-headed fellow parrot.

Nevertheless, as smart as they are, most of you reading this could probably not only add $2+2+2$ but do more complex thinking and easily outsmart the smartest African Grey Parrot. But can you out-grace them?

The answer to that is not as obvious. African Grey parrots are known not only for their intelligence but also for their strong social ties with one another and have amazed researchers with their demonstration of empathy, moral reciprocity, and altruism. In the January issue of “Current Biology,” two researchers from Germany reported evidence of altruism in the parrots. First, they trained the parrots to exchange metal washers for treats. They then placed two parrots in adjoining cages: each cage had a window in the front facing the researcher and there was a hole in the wall separating the birds. The researcher offered the first parrot the washers it had learned could be exchanged for treats but held out the treats only to the second parrot. The first parrot could get the washer used to “buy a treat” but couldn’t reach the treat to receive it while the second parrot could reach the treat but not the washers it needed to offer for the exchange. The parrots quickly sized up the situation and without hesitation, the first parrot began to take the washers one by one and hand them through the hole in the cage wall to the second parrot who used them to exchange for treats. The first parrot continued to do this even though the second parrot was eating all of the treats. Eventually, the researchers reversed the parrots’ roles and the second parrot returned the favor sharing tokens with the first but, as the researchers point out, neither of the birds could have known that the giving and receiving would eventually even out.

“When they gave the token, the other bird was getting the food and they were not,” one researcher said. “I think they had the sense that this was a useful token, and that this token would turn into food for the other bird. It’s very shocking. It’s surprisingly giving, just because the only thing the bird doing it gets is that warm glow of helping.”

Would you out-grace those African Grey Parrots?

Unfortunately, I’m not confident that if you were to put two human beings in the same situation, every one of them would willingly give the tokens to their companion, watching them chomp down on treats while they themselves got nothing in return. Some might do it only after negotiating a deal with their companion: “I’ll give you the washers if you give me at least half the treats in return.” Others might do it reluctantly all the while grumbling to their companion about what an imposition it was on the giver. And still others might curl up in a corner and say, “Get your own @#&*! treats. I don’t have time for this nonsense.” If human beings were as naturally inclined to grace as African Grey Parrots are, Jesus would not have had to spend so much time trying to hammer the importance of grace through our too thick skulls.

The season of Lent has begun and during the next forty days, the church has traditionally asked people to give up something to remind ourselves of the sacrifice and grace that Christ showed us in his willingness to go all the way to the cross on our behalf. Like African Grey Parrots giving up their metal washers so that their companions might benefit, we are to consider ways in which we too can exhibit sacrifice and grace toward others during this season. Often, the things Christians choose to give up for Lent — chocolate, coffee, hard liquor, red meat — might represent the sacrificial part of the Lenten season but don’t really contain much grace. No one benefits from your giving up coffee, and your sacrifice might even create a hardship for those having to deal with your caffeine withdrawal! This year, then, the Board of Elders are asking you to consider a sacrifice of a different kind, one that *is* full of grace. We are asking you to emulate, if not surpass, the grace of the African Grey parrots to do something with no obvious benefit to yourself but that might make a world of difference for another.

This Lent, we would like each person reading this newsletter to consider giving up 15 minutes of your time each week of Lent on behalf of Ding Jiaxi. Jiaxi is the husband of our church member, Sophie Luo, who was placed in secret detention by the Chinese government just after Christmas for his work on behalf of human rights in China. The Chinese government refuses to say where he is being held, has not allowed him access to legal representation, and has not allowed him to communicate with anyone in the outside world, including his family. We are concerned about his safety, and we grieve for his family. With the help of Amnesty International, we are coordinating a letter writing campaign on his behalf and the Board of Elders is asking you to **make this your Lenten Project this year**. We will have sample letters available at Coffee Hour on Sundays, and for those out of town, there are links to sample letters on the home page of our website, www.unionuniversitychurch.org, as well as more information about his plight. We are hoping that people will write not just one letter, but at least **one letter every week between now and Easter**, and encourage you to ask friends and family members to join you in this project.

It’s a small sacrifice that each of us can make on behalf of Jiaxi and his family, and frankly, if we can’t do even that much for another in need, we will be forced to concede the title of “Most Grace-filled of God’s creatures” to the African Grey Parrot. I love birds, but I would really hate to be beaten in that contest by some parrots. Please join us in our Lenten project on behalf of Jiaxi and his family as we demonstrate the depth of our grace for them.



<https://www.npr.org/2020/01/09/794867653/polly-share-a-cracker-parrots-can-practice-acts-of-kindness-study-finds>

Church News & Events



Mission of the Month



The Board of Elders has selected Amnesty International as the Mission of the Month for March because it is an organization that is working to free political prisoners like Ding Jiaxi. Amnesty International is a global movement of more than 7 million people who take injustice personally. It is independent of any political ideology, economic interest or religion. They are campaigning for a world where human rights are enjoyed by all. If you wish to make a monetary donation please make checks out to UUC with "Amnesty" in the memo line

Free Ding Jiaxi



(Photos: Chris Potter/The Spectator)

On February 17, Sophie Luo presented background information on her husband, Ding Jiaxi's, imprisonment at a gathering of at least 100 students, faculty, staff, and community members in Holmes Auditorium on the Alfred University campus.

Following the event, petitions on behalf of Ding were available for people to sign. These same petitions were also available for signing during the UUC coffee hour on Sunday, February 23.

If you were unable to attend Sophie's excellent presentation about her husband's detention, you can view it at the following site:
<https://vimeo.com/392561659>

with thanks to Ramin's friend JoJo Miyaki.

How You Can Help

- **During Lent, write a letter a week to the official in charge of Dings incarceration -** International stamps and pre-addressed envelopes are being provided by Lana Meissner. There is a folder in the foyer of the Church Center for your letters. Place completed letters in the folder and we will mail them for you.
- **Write notes/cards of support to Sophie and her children.** Jen Smith will provide addresses and stamps for notes and cards.
- **Spread the word** - Ask friends and relatives to write letters and sign petitions. Information and documents are available on the UUC website.
- **Learn more** - Go to the UUC website www.unionuniversitychurch.org to get more in-depth information. Go to the Amnesty International website <https://www.amnesty.org/en/> Go to the China Change website <https://chinachange.org/> for news and commentary from those who work for change in China. At this website there is a petition for academics to sign asking President Xi Jinping to give freedom of speech back to the Chinese people.



- **Keep the faith** - Each week during Lent you will hear the story of letter writing campaigns that have worked in freeing prisoners of conscience.

Church News & Events, cont.

We Hold These Truths to Be Self-Evident

from the NewsletterNewsletter

When one of the few remaining copies of the Declaration of Independence was put on display in Phoenix in 2004. A reporter for The Arizona Republic asked 11 citizens why the document was still relevant today. Here is a summary of their comments:

“It is like a Bible that has been in the family for generations.”

“It is one of the world’s most precious documents.”

“It is a living breathing document with basic values underlying it.”

“It began with some rabble-rousers who believed we should be free, that we should be able to choose our own destiny.”

“The document is very much alive. It’s organic. It is not archival material. It’s real.”

“I think the overwhelming message of the declaration is that it’s okay to disagree with the government.”

A pastor, Dr. William H. Stewart Sr., of the First Institutional Baptist Church, summarized the general consensus with these words: “It is one of the greatest documents that has ever been written about people seeking freedom from an oppressive power.”

While political and personal freedoms are not the equivalent of spiritual freedom in Christ, they are blessings that should be available to all. Jesus, after all, identified himself as one coming to “proclaim release to the captives” (Luke 4:18).

Christian Math

A few Sundays ago, Rev. DeMott used the Children’s Time to teach a lesson on “Christian Math” and exponential growth. She asked the kids to stand in a line and starting with the first child, asked each to extend a welcome (hug, handshake, or smile) to the child next in line. They watched how long it took to pass the welcome down the line and Rev. DeMott asked how long it might take to continue passing that welcome all around the congregation. “A long time,” was their guess. She then described the concept of exponential growth. “What if the first person

welcomed two people and those two people each welcomed two more and each of those welcomed two more?” They did the math to discover that within three steps, 16 people would have received a welcome. “Let’s apply the concept of exponential growth to the congregation,” she said, and starting with the first child in line and going down the line and into the congregation, each person receiving a welcome had to share that welcome with two people who had not yet been welcomed. We blanketed the congregation with welcomes in less than two minutes. “Jesus says it is not enough to extend kindness only to those who are kind to you,” Rev. DeMott concluded, “but that Christians are supposed to spread kindness exponentially. We are to be kind to those who aren’t kind to us and to the stranger we don’t know, and to everyone we meet. If everyone were to love exponentially, kindness would cover the world in no time.”

Prayer For Prisoners - Amnesty International

*Lord Jesus,
you experienced in person
torture and death
as a prisoner of conscience.
You were beaten and flogged
and sentenced to an agonizing death
though you had done no wrong.
Be now with prisoners of conscience
throughout the world.*

*Be with them in their fear and loneliness,
in the agony of physical and mental torture,
and in the face of execution and death.*

*Stretch out your hands in power
to break their chains.*

*Be merciful to the oppressor and the torturer,
and place a new heart within them.*

*Forgive all injustice in our lives,
and transform us to be
instruments of your peace,
for by your wounds we are healed.*

 DO JUSTICE ...

love kindness ...

WALK HUMBLY

with our God.

MICAH 6:8





*Almighty and ever living God, you invite us deeper into your world, your people, your Lent.
May this time be one of outward focus; seeking you in those we often ignore.
Help us live a Lent focused on freedom, generosity, and encounter.
Give us hearts hungry to serve you and those who need what we have to give.*

- Author Unknown

Lenten History

from the NewsletterNewsletter

Though the date of Easter varies, the majority of the Lenten season occurs during March. In fact, the word *Lent* comes from the Anglo-Saxon words *lententid* (meaning “March”) and *lenten* (meaning “spring”).

The first reference to Lent dates back to 325 AD, in one of the 20 canons decreed at the council of Nicaea. By the eighth century, Christians started observing Lent, and a 10th-century monk named Aelfric connected the use of ashes and “the Lenten fast” to the pre-Easter period.

Lent lasts 40 days to represent Jesus’ time in the wilderness, when he was tempted by the devil. The six Sundays that occur between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday aren’t counted as part of Lent; instead, as the traditional day of worship, they’re considered “mini-Easters.”

Change Your Clocks



Daylight Savings Time begins at 2:00am on Sunday, March 8. Don't forget to set your clocks ahead on Saturday night.

A Modern-day Parable

from the NewsletterNewsletter, April 2020

“In Luke 15, Jesus tells three parables about the precious being lost and, at great lengths, found again. The kingdom of heaven, he says, is like that. But most of us don’t shepherd sheep and wouldn’t fret over one lost coin. A child, on the other hand ...

“In fall 2019, as night fell in northern Minnesota, 6-year-old Ethan and his dog wandered off. Family and police grew frantic because the area consisted of fields, woods and swamps. Authorities requested assistance.

“The kingdom of heaven, Jesus might say, is like 600 volunteers searching diligently in the dark for a child they didn’t know. It’s like Steve Fines who, though also a stranger to the boy, grabbed his company’s pricy heat-seeking drone and worked the camera for hours, until it detected Ethan huddling with his dog, safe but cold. Yes, the kingdom of heaven — indeed God — is like people giving their all and refusing to quit until the lost one is found.”



So too might the kingdom of heaven be like the people of the Union University Church giving their support in every way they can to help free a man held in captivity.

People

Chamber Singers Fundraiser for UUC

Thanks goes to Luanne Crosby and the Alfred University Chamber Singers for their “sold out” fundraiser on behalf of UUC. This was a student initiated event undertaken as a way of saying “Thank You” for the use of church space for concerts. The music was terrific as were the sweet and savory treats. Free will donations of more than \$800 were collected.



Thank You To

Larry & Jan Casey who organized the Wellsville Community Kitchen to serve 16 meals and 19 take-outs on Saturday, February 8th. Helping them were Corrie Burdick and friend Amber, Bob Heineman, and Joan Bowden who made cookies.

Why Pray

In her February 9th sermon, Rev. DeMott preached about “Intercessory Prayer.” As we enter the 40 days of Lent when we take time for reflection, the final paragraph of her sermon bears repeating.

“And so when we pray, ‘Heal my loved one of their illness,’ what we are saying through the inadequacy of our words is, ‘I love this person so much and the reality of their mortality is unbearable to me. I don’t want them to die and don’t know what I will do if they die, and I am so afraid of a future without them in it that I can’t breathe thinking about it. If you can, God, take this horrible situation away so that none of us have to bear the heartache of being mortal.’ We pray for the healing of bodies because we don’t want to have to pray later for the healing of broken hearts, but we are mortal and sometimes life hurts, and so no matter what may come, as Christians we continue to pray because we know that in the face of heartbreak times, we need to be in the presence of a love that can bear us up and lead us on … no matter what may come.

“And so we pray. It’s what we do; we are Christians and Christians pray for one another. We pray for ourselves; we pray for others who are in pain or afraid or hurting; we pray for a broken world mired in despair. We pray with inadequate words knowing only that we need to reach out and touch the love of Christ and hear the assurance that he spoke to Julian of Norwich, when he said to her in the depth of her prayers, “All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.”

In Our Prayers

Sharon & Roger Smith, Sophie Luo & family, Hudson Crew Buckles and family, Mindy Smith’s sister (Debbie Dietz).

*We always thank
GOD for all of you
and continually
mention you in
our prayers.*

I Thessalonians 1:2, NIV

March Board Members of the Month

Deacon.....MaryAnn Whittemore (whitteduc@twc.com; 252.676.0951)
Elder.....Rob Reginio (Reginio@alfred.edu; 860.966.6766)
BOCE.....Larry Casey (ljcasey@frontiernet.net; 607.382.2772)
Fellowship.....Luanne Crosby (fclarke@alfred.edu; 585.260.0026)
Trustee.....Denise Grandusky (dgrandusky@hotmail.com; 585.596.5149)
Who do you call? Flowers or lay leading—call an Elder; greeting or coffee hour—call a Deacon;
Sunday school—call BOCE; building issues—call a Trustee.

Sunday School Teachers

March 1	Sophie Luo
March 8	Monica Reginio
March 15	Cathy Rees
March 22	Shaune Henry
March 29	Myrna Leocadio



Teachers are needed for April and May. Please contact Sophie if you can help
djxlsc@gmail.com

Upcoming Sunday Leaders

If you are not able to serve as scheduled, please switch with someone listed on the charts below and notify the Church Office. If you are unable to find someone to switch with you, please contact either the Elder of the Month or the Deacon of the Month.

Date	Greeter	Lay Leader	Flowers	Coffee Hour	Usher
March 1 Lent 1	Meacham	Reginio	Communion	Henry	Ninos
March 8 Lent 2	Napolitano	Cartledge	None	Taylor-Austin	Porter
March 15 Lent 3	Luo	Whittemore	None	Daisy Wu	Porter
March 22 Lent 4	Crosby	Watson	None	Watson	Porter
March 29 Lent 5	Rees	Acton	None	Tucker	Porter
April 5 Palms	Casey	Casey	Communion	Edwards/Ninos	Ninos
April 12 Easter	Chambers	Buckwalter	Meissner	Chambers	Ninos
April 19	Stephens	TBD	Stephens	Burdick	Ninos
April 26	Grandusky	Dewey	Grandusky	Schulze	Ninos

MARCH




Mission of the Month

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



In march winter is holding back and spring is pulling forward. Something holds and something pulls inside of us too. Jean Hersey

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 10:30 Lent 1 Worship: Chalice communion	2	3	4 12pm Book Grp	5	6	7
8 10:30 Lent 2 Worship 	9	10	11 12pm Book Grp	12	13	14
15 10:30 Lent 3 Worship	16	17	18 12pm Book Grp	19 	20	21
22 10:30 Lent 4 Worship	23	24	25 12pm Book Grp	26	27	28
29 10:30 Lent 5 Worship	30	31				

Just for Fun



"I thought Palm Sunday was when everyone went to Florida for spring break."

A New Twist on Resurrection

A man was blissfully driving along the highway, when he saw the Easter Bunny hopping across the middle of the road. He swerved to avoid hitting the Bunny, but unfortunately the rabbit jumped in front of his car and was hit. The basket of eggs went flying all over the place. Candy, too. The driver, being a sensitive man as well as an animal lover, pulled over to the side of the road, and got out to see what had become of the Bunny carrying the basket. Much to his dismay, the colorful Bunny was dead. The driver felt guilty and began to cry.

A woman driving down the same highway saw the man crying on the side of the road and pulled over. She stepped out of her car and asked the man what was wrong. "I feel terrible," he explained, "I accidentally hit the Easter Bunny and killed it. What should I do?"

The woman told the man not to worry. She knew exactly what to do. She went to her car trunk, and pulled out a spray can. She walked over to the limp, dead Bunny, and sprayed the entire contents of the can onto the little furry animal.

Miraculously the Easter Bunny came to back life, jumped up, picked up the spilled eggs and candy, waved its paw at the two humans and hopped on down the road. 50 yards away the Easter Bunny stopped, turned around, waved and hopped on down the road another 50 yards, turned, waved, hopped another 50 yards and waved again!!!!

The man was astonished. He said to the woman, "What in heaven's name is in your spray can?" The woman turned the can around so that the man

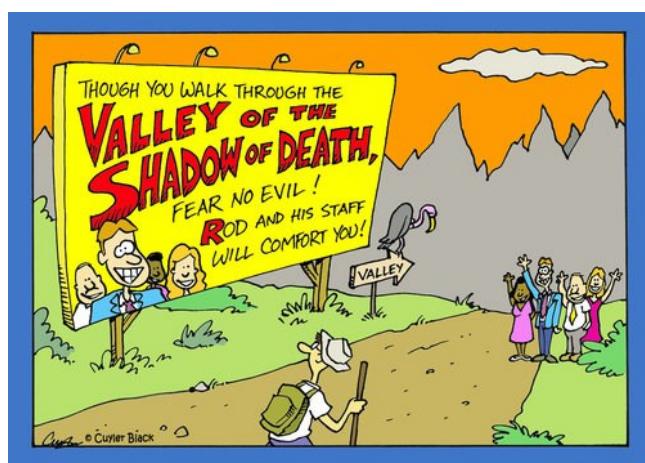
could read the label. It said: "Hair spray. Restores life to dead hair. Adds permanent wave."



New Twist on Lot's Tale

A father was reading Bible stories to his young son. He read, "The man named Lot was warned to take his wife and flee out of the city, but his wife looked back and was turned to salt."

His son asked, "What happened to the flea?"



Hmmmmmm

⇒ 364 days of the year: "Do NOT eat anything you find on the ground."

Easter: "Go and search in the yard for candy and eggs that a strange giant bunny left on the ground for you, kids!"

⇒ A priest, a minister, and a rabbit go into a blood bank. The rabbit says "I think I'm a type-O."



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